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Ābel (אָבֵל) in the Bible.—By R. J. LAU, Ph.D., Columbia University, New York City.

Siegfried and Stade (*Hebräisches Handwörterbuch*, p. 5^a) translate this word ‘grassy plain, pasturage’ (Aue, Trift); others have suggested that it should be read אָבֵן.

It neither means ‘grassy plain,’ nor must it be changed to אָבֵן for the following reasons:

1. On such an אָבֵל the Israelites had placed the ‘Ark of Jahve’, אָבֵל גְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר הִנֵּיחוּ עַלְיָה אַתְּ-אַרוֹן יְהָה (1 Sam. 6, 18): If this had been a ‘grassy plain,’ the text would read אָבֵל : אֲשֶׁר הִנֵּיחוּ עַלְיָה instead of בָּה, it must therefore have been an object higher than the ground itself. According to verses 14 and 15 it was an אָבֵן גְּדוֹלָה, ‘a large stone,’ which still stood in the field of Jehoshua (v. 18, last clause) in the time of the writer of the book of Samuel.
2. Other passages in which אָבֵל occurs seem to prove that these stones were placed in certain localities
 - a) to commemorate well-known events of the past:
 - α) the אָבֵל of the Egyptians, where the Israelites (called here Egyptians) mourned for Joseph; cf. Gen. 50, 11.
 - β) the אָבֵל מִחְוָלָה, ‘the אָבֵל of the dance,’ which had been placed in memory of a certain ‘great rejoicing’ of the people; Judges 7, 22; 1 Kings 14, 12; 19, 16.
 - γ) the אָבֵל בֵּית מַעַכָּה, ‘the אָבֵל at Bêth Maa-chah;’ 1 Kings 15, 20; 2 Kings 15, 29; 2 Sam. 20, 14, 15.
 - b) to mark possession; with a signification similar to that of the Assyrian *kudurru*, ‘boundary-stone.’
 - α) אָבֵל מִים, ‘the אָבֵל of (at) the water(s);’ 2 Chron. 16, 14.

β אָבֵל הַשְׁפִּיטִים (אָבֵל of (at) the locust-trees;'

Nu. 33, 49.

γ אָבֵל כֶּרֶםִים (אָבֵל of (at) the vine-yards;'

Judg. 11, 33.

This אָבֵל stone was not merely a boundary stone, but one that marked 'possession.' The fact that the word occurs only in the singular goes far to prove, that

1. only *one* stone was placed on the land, at the waters, in the grove of locust-trees, or in the vineyards, mentioned above;
2. that most likely it was larger than a common boundary-stone, but lower than the cart on which the 'ark' was moved.
3. A further proof for this assertion can be adduced from the Assyrian *ablu, iblu*:

- a) Nebuchadnezzar styles himself (VR. 55, 5): *nāśir kudurrēti, mukinu ablē*, 'protector of the boundary-stones, and establisher of the *ablē* (stones).' According to this passage the *kudurru* was different from the *ablu*.
- b) Nabopalassar says (OBI. I, col. II, 28–31: *amel DIM. GAL. E ištattum (=ištēniš) iblē ukinnū* 'the master-builders determined the *iblē*.' Here *iblē* must mean not merely the boundaries, but rather the *extent* of the boundaries in either direction, that is they determined where the *iblē*-stones should be placed, which marked the *extent of the boundaries*.

According to these two passages the Assyrians made use of more than one *ablu* or *iblu*, which were *not* the same as the *kudurrē*, for the words occur only in the plural. The Hebrew אָבֵל occurs only in the singular, and was placed 1) to commemorate a certain event; or 2) to signify possession.